DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 591 HE 000 819

By-Muirhead, Peter P.

Campus Insurgency: Evolution or Revolution.

American Association of School Administrators, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date 18 Feb 69

Note-21p.; Paper presented at annual convention of the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 18, 1969

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.15

Descriptors-*Activism, *Administrative Policy, Curriculum Evaluation, *Decision Making, Faculty Evaluation, *Higher Education, Student Characteristics, *Student Participation, Student School Relationship

Today's younger generation is unique. Many are the products of affluence and many others come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Both sense a frustration and feel disillusioned with a society that rewards the rich and denies opportunities to the poor. They are also children of an electronic age and the exposure to instantaneous experiences reinforces their impatience. Yet the young share with other groups and institutions a deep sense of powerlessness. Although the anger of radical students and their sympathizers can be understood, it does not justify the violence seen at many institutions. It is ineffective to reply to student protests simply by trying to repress them. Administrators in colleges and high schools must make every effort to establish communication with their students and grant them responsibility. Never before have students been better prepared to have a voice in the decisions affecting them. They are, too, often right in condemning the complacency of their elders. Students should be given full responsibility for their personal conduct on and off campus and the opportunities to evaluate their faculty's teaching performance and participate in curriculum reform. The most important concern of students--the quality of undergraduate teaching--should be shared by administrators and faculty. The idealism of activist students should be welcomed, their right to dissent rigorously protected, and their alliance sought. (JS)

ED029591

CAMPUS INSURGENCY: EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION (Speech before the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, New Jersey)

by: Peter P. Muirhead

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

HE 000 819

CAMPUS INSURGENCY: EVOLUTION OR REVOLUTION

An Address by Peter P. Muirhead
Acting U. S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

If F. Scott Fitzgerald were still around and were talking in my stead about a younger generation that does in some respects resemble his, I imagine he might begin with something like, "The young are very different from you and me." And someone in the crowd, with a lingering touch of Hemingway, would no doubt say, "Yeah, they're a hell of a lot younger."

And I think Fitzgerald, as he was when he spoke about the rich, would be more right than wrong. For all their inclination to regard the age-old attitudes of adolescence as something that never existed until they did, this generation of young adults is in some very real ways different from you and me--not only as we are now but as we were when we were their age.

No generation has been subject to more exhaustive surveys, more expert scrutiny, more endless analyses by sociologists, psychologists, seers, savants and septuagenerians than the current bunch. When they are stretched

---

Before the annual convention of the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, New Jersey, Tuesday, February 18, 1969, 2:30 p.m.

out upon the operating table and minutely dissected, the whole world is watching. When they "do their thing," they do it before an attentive audience of anxious millions--those who do not see it "live" can always catch it on instant replay.

I am not a sociologist, a psychologist, a seer, a savant or a septuagenarian. So I can't pretend to be able to understand or to explain all that turns the young on or off. But I like to think that I am not too old, or too young, to listen to people under thirty--and to learn from them. I fervently believe in adult education, which I take to mean the education of adults as well as by them. I am also no advocate of rote learning, and I would no more blindly buy what the young say of themselves than I would want them to swallow without a good seasoning of salt the things we have to say about them.

So down to business. And that must begin, I think, with some of the things that do make many of today's young unique. Many of them are the children of affluence--the sons and scions of suburbia. Where their fathers sought to escape from the terrors of economic insecurity in a world of economic scarcity, a good many of the young seek to escape from the very

affluence their fathers struggled to achieve--to escape, at least, from the notion of affluence as an end in itself.

At the other end of the spectrum are those young people we have come to refer to as "disadvantaged"--those who have been denied the cultural and economic benefits of our society for reasons that are foreign to all that we profess to believe. They, like their more affluent counterpart, are disturbed with a society that denies the disadvantaged the opportunity that is implied in the status of first-class citizenry. It is little wonder that this fermentation has resulted in disillusionment and frustration on the part of these young people.

Some of them seek only to flee the world, to "cop out" of a society they feel they can never accept and never alter. But many more, I think, are appalled and outraged by the terrible contradictions that torment our society and will not rest until they have done all they can to bring the America that is a lot closer to the America that ought to be. In the case of the more affluent, they cannot, for one thing, enjoy the fruits of their own good fortune when they feel it has been earned at the expense of the many who continue to receive so

many of the bruises and so few of the blessings that our society has to offer. In the case of the less fortunate young, their disillusionment and frustration manifests itself often times in total rejection of the system. We don't want this! We want to demonstrate to them that the system is not satisfied in perpetuating the status quo, but is, indeed, anxious to implement change for the better.

To those who would point to all the progress we have made they could reply in the words of Daniel Patrick Moynihan: "The teaming, disorganized life of impoverished slums has all but disappeared among the North Atlantic democracies--save only the United States. ....it can be said with fair assurance that mass poverty and squalor, of the kind that may be encountered in almost any large American city, simply cannot be found in comparable cities in Europe, or Canada, or Japan." Small wonder that one observer has told of encountering "some white youths from our most exclusive towns in the Eastern seabord" who wished "that they were Negro students in the civil-rights movement...who have infinitely less, but apparently more."

The young are also the children of an electronic age--and all that implies. The electronic media have indeed massaged their psyches and sensibilities in ways that drown out any other messages they may purport to carry. So more than most of us, more than the young of any other age, the current generation lives in a world of instantaneous experience--experiences and expects everything in the here and now--wants heaven today, not tomorrow. In a good many ways, we live in a world that seems to me to reinforce rather than restrain the characteristic attitudes and anxieties of the young--their impatience, their absolutism, their effort to see and seize eternity in the instant, and so on. And it is I think partly for that reason that today--as in no earlier ear of human history--the young exert such an extraordinary influence upon their elders.

But once all this is said, we must add that the current generations have a good deal more in common that either of them might like to admit. Most important, I think, is what I might call the phenomenon of powerlessness. In an age when everything seems possible, it seems somehow impossible to

get anything done. In an age in which events in the remotest parts of the world can exert such enormous influence upon our lives, we seem unable to exert much influence even upon events within the immediate ambit of our daily existence. This phenomenon, in some way or another, seems to me to affect not only individuals but institutions, not only neighborhoods but nations. What seems to have happened is that the attitudes, the institutions and the arrangements that govern the various relations between men--economic, political, personal--have simply not kept up with the kinds of changes that have occurred, and the incredible pace at which they continue to occur, in other aspects of our world and our lives. As one observer has remarked, "In these times, our kinship is not so much with the Year 2000 as with the Year 1776. We are back to the basics of organizing a new society and providing for its governance."

The point I am trying to get to is simply that the problem our colleges and schools face are not unique--they parallel, and are indeed part and parcel of the larger problems facing our society as a whole--problems stemming from both the fact and the feeling of powerlessness that, in some

degree or other, frustrate us all, and which afflict most acutely those who experience more of the ills and less of the advantages, our society offers. On the campus as in the country, those who have had least say about the way things are run have therefore long since begun to raise the decibel level of their discontent to a degree that the most distant and deaf among us can no longer fail to hear or head.

And now that they have succeeded in getting our ear--as well as sometimes raising our ire--what is it they are trying to tell us? That depends, first of all I think, on who is talking. Last month, in an issue devoted entirely to American youth, Fortune magazine in a kind of roundup of various surveys divided the current crop of college students into three groups: the real radicals who account for two percent or less of all college students; the "forerunners" who account for some forty percent; and the careerists or conformists who account for close to sixty percent.

The radicals are of course the extreme activists, who attack the university less as an institution in itself than as a surrogate and symbol of

society as a whole--and whose real aim, so far as it is possible to discover any, seems to be to dis.upt and ultimately destroy our society as we know it. The "forerunners" are those by and large who share the express ideals and aims of the radicals--which are nothing more or less than those our society has always honored on special occasions--but who really do want the system to work, the society to live up to its ideals, and who will only resort to the so-called politics of confrontation when they feel thay have no other resources. And the careerists are those who are more or less willing to accept the accustomed ways and the established channels, in education and occupation, toward self-definition.

I have no doubt these are immensely over-simplified categories that do little justice to the great diversity in student attitudes and ideals. And I use them simply because they seem to me legitimate enough for general discussion.

Most of us would agree that there is very little the college or school or anyone can do to reach the so-called radical students. The concern must

be, instead, to try to remove the kinds of conditions that enable them to reach so many other students. It seems pretty obvious, from the by now almost classic stages in which campus confrontation occurs, that radicals succeed almost solely because they command a good deal of latent sympathy and support among the "forerunner" group, as well as among some of the "career" group and the faculty, and because they are able to manuever the university into acts that anger the sympathetic students and faculty enough to force them off the sidelines and into the ranks of the radicals.

I take it as axiomatic that none of us can condone riots or rampant disorder either in the country or on the campus. Most of us, I am sure can understand the anger and frustration that students must often feel when every peaceful effort to produce change in our colleges and universities seems to take so long. But this can never be an excusé for the violence and vandalism, the blind and brutal behavior, the utter disregard for the desires and rights of others, that has marked many of our campus protests. Not all the lack of sensitivity of the worst administrator, or all the stifling atmosphere of the most

lethargic institution, can justify the kind of chaos we have seen far too much of.

But by now we ought also to understand that it is neither intelligent nor effective to try to reply to student protest simply and solely by trying to repress it. We ought to understand that we cannot continue to procrastinate in dealing with some of the very real and legitimate grievances that students have against our institutions of higher learning. Moreover, while we can understand the climate of concern that gives rise to them, we must resist the all too easy solution of enacting laws that require universities to cut off Federal aid to students who take part in campus protests. Rather, I think we ought to follow the more difficult but infinitely more equitable policy of insisting that any decision on depriving a student of Federal aid--like any decision on whether to accept, or suspend, or expel a student--ought to be left to the institution itself.

Beyond this, we are going to have to stop sparing the horses in our efforts to open up all possible avenues of contact and communication between

students and universities. Students are simply not going to get more docile. They are going to get more demanding. And the more we delay in meeting their reasonable demands the more unreasoning and unreasonable their demands will become.

As we all know, the unrest on our college and university campuses has recently spread to our public schools as well. Indeed, because the public schools and their surrounding communities are so interconnected--so that nothing important happens in one that does not vitally affect the other--and because high schools have no buffer, as universities do in the form of sympathetic faculty, between the students and administrators, I think the unrest in our high schools may well be more potentially explosive than university unrest.

I need hardly observe that these high school students of today are the university students of tomorrow. Or underscore the fact that university administrators and public school superintendents who have encountered unrest without upheaval have followed precisely the same pattern: they have listened

to their students and, in every legitimate way possible, let them in on a piece of the action.

It's about time we realized that never have students come to our colleges and universities better prepared to have some say in the running of their lives and their learning. Never have they been less willing to submit to the seniority system of success in life--less able to accept or endure all the old axioms for advancement like "wait your turn" or "if you want to get along go along" or "no man can give orders unless he first learns how to take them."

It is all too easy to inveigh against the excesses and illusions of the young. The naive assumption that history began when they were born, that nothing honest or important happened in the world before they appeared to "tell it like it is" and like it ought to be; the assumption that any action or excess can be excused by the altitude of their ideals; the tendency of the latterday Savonarolas and John Browns among them to see themselves as the sole guerillas of the good, the true and the beautiful, the only true corrosive and cleansing agents of a corrupt society.

But when all this is said, I think I stand in good company when I say that I find this generation of young Americans far more attractive, articulate, and able than any I have experienced.

If they sometimes seem to view their elders with more skepticism than reverence, we can't entirely blame them. They are not exactly off target when they say that, by and large, their elders have been all too satisfied to sit back and declaim sonorous and swellsounding phrases about the way things ought to be, and to use up enormous quantities of energy and ingenuity trying to explain why they can't do very much about the way things are. When we tell them to be patient, they accuse us of procrastination and postponement. They point to their own participation in the Civil Rights efforts of the early Sixties, and ask us "Where were you?" They point to the poverty, despair, and injustices in our society and say, "How can you live with these so easily?"

We have answers, of course. They are not entirely adequate, because we are not entirely innocent, but neither are they entirely without merit. We may say that ideals are always absolute, and existence never is. And so on,

and on. And if we would not be entirely right, neither would they be entirely wrong.

So what do we do. What we must do, I think, those of us who strongly sympathize with many of the young, is in our schools and our society to give the young every opportunity possible for putting their immense energies and their intense idealism to constructive and creative use.

And our schools and colleges, like other institutions in our society, offer them far too few opportunities of that kind.

And if I had to sum up in a single sentence the root cause of student unrest I should say this: Students desire and deserve, and universities in varying degrees deny them, an adequate say in determining what happens to them in our institutions of higher learning.

So what is it that students want, and what can colleges and universities do? First, they want--and I see no reason why they should not have--full responsibility for their personal conduct on and off campus. I think it is high time the university got out of the custodial business, and let students

run their lives the way ordinary Americans do--subject, of course, to the same laws and the same penalties that govern us all.

Second, they want--and I see no reason why they should not have--an opportunity to express their views on the teaching performance of individual faculty members and to have their views count for something. There are methods for siphoning out the popularity contest aspects of this kind of evaluation. I appreciate some of the reasons, both good and bad, why there is a good deal of resistance to this notion. But I am more inclined to agree with the students who feel that without some such opportunity research will continue to wax and teaching will continue to wane as a factor in faculty status and stature.

Third, students want--and I think they ought to have--participation in helping to improve the curriculum. Here again I think there are some cogent reasons why students ought not to have a controlling or even an equal voice. But I think there are also good reasons why they ought to have an effective voice.

There are also students who feel they ought to have real representation in the administrative affairs of the university and on boards of trustees or regents. I frankly doubt that this kind of representation, even if it is possible, would be terribly productive for anybody.

Permit me to return for a moment to what is probably the most important concern of students--the restoration of undergraduate teaching to its rightful role as one of the main reasons for the very existence of a university and one of the main concerns of the university faculty. I often hear it said, for example, that students are transients at a university--that students come and go, and ought not to be in a position to have any binding and abiding influence upon such essentially institutional matters as the status of faculty members whose entire careers are at stake.

I do not think there are any easy answers to this problem. But let me at least point out some of the things to be said on the students' side. For one thing, students aren't as transient as all that. In the Fall of 1966, for example, the American Council of Education conducted a rather elaborate survey among

some 200,000 freshmen in 251 postsecondary institutions. The survey showed, among other things, that some 40 percent of these freshmen planned to pursue a Masters degree.

Secondly, what happens--or doesn't happen--to a student at a university has far more than a merely transient impact on him. It is, in his life, a matter of major importance. And precisely because he may not be there that long he wants, and he ought to be able, to get the most out of his stay at a university. Once students have their say, then they and the institution can work out the various kinds of mutual arrangements--in terms of courses and curriculum and so on--that can enable the students to pursue the kind of education they find most relevant to their needs. This is what universities like Antioch, and Temple, and Macalester, and many more are doing.

There are, indeed, a wealth of ways that our colleges and universities ought to be exploring far more intensively to bring student and the teacher back into the center of their concerns.

I think there may, for example, be a good deal of merit in proposals such as Paul Woodring's for reserving more specialized studies for the postgraduate degrees and granting bachelor's degrees after perhaps two or three years of "liberal" education. It may be necessary as well to differentiate between PhD's for those who primarily want to teach and PhD's for those who primarily want to do research. There are all kinds of possibilities worth exploring, and worth experimenting with.

And I cannot overstate how urgent it is that universities get going in these directions. More than any in memory, today's students take very seriously the old admonition of Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living." And they've come up with a few admonitions of their own--like "the unjust rules aren't worth abiding by," and others along the same line. My own feeling is that a university, of all places, ought to encourage the young in their questioning of all that is and their questing for all that ought to be; it ought to applaud their unrest and their indignation and their outrage, and give them every opportunity to express their attitudes and ideas

in meaningful ways--whether it be by combining study and community service, or by engaging in a good deal of independent and interdisciplinary study--the possibilities are endless.

Students no longer seek to sit at the table of learning simply to be seen and not heard--or to speak only when they are spoken to--or to eat everything that someone else puts on their plate.

One way or another, they want and they will have a real say in running their lives and their learning. President Nixon a few days ago when speaking at the White House to an outstanding group of high schools students--in making reference to the lowering of the voting age requirement--said he hoped the vote could be extended to 18 year-olds "not because, as many say, if you are old enough to fight you are old enough to vote . . . . but because you are smart enough to vote." He went on to say that the new generation of Americans is not only the best educated generation of Americans, but it also is "the most involved--involved in problems of your neighborhood, your nation and the world." It is this "smartness" and desire to become involved that I feel

must be capitalized upon and channeled into wholesome, viable activities. It is not enough for us to listen to the young, and to then implement their ideas. They must be given the opportunity to actively participate--to become actively involved in both the running of their lives and their learning. We are missing the boat, it seems to me, if we do not appeal to the idealism they say is conspicuously absent in today's society. It seems to me, then, that we have a two-way street here with responsibilities on both sides: the activist students--whose right to dissent must be rigorously protected--have the responsibility to ensure a climate for learning for the majority, and the administration must make provision for on-going, sincerely motivated dialog with the minority. The answer lies, I believe, in improving communications between all parts of the academic community.

Our colleges and universities are going to undergo considerable change in the years ahead. Whether they do it the easy or the hard way will depend on whether the students are on their side. And that will depend a good deal on what universities do to convince students universities are on their side.

# # # # #